

Terrible Swift Sword: 1862

The title for the 2022 Friends of the *Boy in Blue* Civil War Symposium was derived from the title of the second book of Bruce Catton's three volume Centennial History of the Civil War. It also reflects a line from Julia Ward Howe's stirring "Battle Hymn of the Republic," published in 1862.

1862 was the darkest year of the American Civil War, from the perspective of the Union cause. With the exception of the capture of Fort's Henry and Donelson, in the war's western theater (Tennessee), things seemed to go from bad to worse: militarily, politically and even socially. In the White House, the young Lincoln boys, Willie and Tad came down with typhoid fever, a condition created by contaminated Potomac River water being piped directly into the presidential residence. On February 20, eleven year old Willie died, leaving both his parents emotionally devastated. If that wasn't tragic enough, the coming of spring witnessed the bloodiest battle in American history to that date—the Battle of Shiloh, in which at least 23,000 men were killed or left wounded. Shiloh served as a wake-up call to both the North and South that this war would be nothing like any they had ever experienced before; it would not be a short war either, as many had believed in the beginning.

Even though General U.S. Grant scored a victory at Shiloh the tremendous losses incurred there caused the public to turn against him—it was alleged (falsely) that Grant was drinking heavily, which clouded his judgment. He was not given the due recognition he deserved as a military leader until his successful siege and capture of Vicksburg, in the summer of 1863.

In the meantime, President Lincoln searched in vain to find a General who could lead the Army of the Potomac to victory in the eastern theater. He tried George B. McClellan, John Pope, McClellan again (just in time for the bloodiest single day battle of the war at Antietam), and Ambrose Burnside. None of them were a match to the Confederacy's pantheon of military leaders: Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, J.E.B. Stuart, Joseph Johnston and Robert E. Lee. In the case of John Pope, after losing decisively at the Battle of Second Bull Run, Lincoln sent him to Minnesota to oversee efforts to put down a full-scale uprising of Dakota Indians, intent on reclaiming their ancestral lands in the Minnesota River valley by killing or driving out all of the encroaching white settlers. Instead of calming the situation, Pope's aggressive posture of trying the Indians for war crimes only made a bad situation even worse.

By mid-1862, Lincoln realized that in order to win final victory, the Union would have to take on and destroy the "root cause of the war," namely the institution of slavery. After the slim military victory Antietam provided him, Lincoln issued his Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in September. It went into effect 100 days later on January 1, 1863, only six days after the hanging of the 38 Dakota in Mankato, the largest mass-execution in American history. The 2022 Friends of the *Boy in Blue* Civil War Symposium is dedicated to telling the story of this tragic and momentous year.